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RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 8128
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 0042
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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 0021
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001429

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR ODILI ON THE OUTS AND IBB TOO

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: During a recent conversation with the Consul General, longtime contact Professor Damachi stated Rivers Governor Odili has been squeezed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to give up his presidential candidacy and control of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) apparatus in Rivers State. Damachi also confirmed our reports of a meeting between President Obasanjo and former head of state Babangida wherein Obasanjo all but told Babangida to exit the party and Babangida all but complied. End Summary.

Odili in Hot Water with Obasanjo

12. (C) During a December 7 conversation with the Consul General, Professor VI Damachi, a close advisor to Governor Odili and former military president Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) said a senior police officer asked to meet Damachi urgently. The meeting occurred December 9. At the meeting, the officer advised Damachi to warn Odili to withdraw his preferred candidate, former Minister of Transport Dr. Abiye Sekibo, from the gubernatorial primary. If not, both would face aggressive EFCC investigation. To underscore the EFCC's seriousness, Rivers State's accounts were frozen that same day, Damachi declared. A cunning tactician himself, Odili did forsake Sekibo, forcing him to withdraw from contention. However, another Odili protg, State Assembly Speaker Ameche, emerged as the winner. This slight of hand evidently did not impress the EFCC. Ameche was detained by the EFCC earlier this week and may be disqualified by the PDP national executive review commission.

13. (C) Damachi stressed that none of these actions against Odili could have been taken minus presidential imprimatur. Quashing Odili's selection for his successor also constituted a clear signal that Odili's presidential hopes had left the infirmary and were heading for the morgue. Damachi maintained that some of Odili's adversaries had slipped President Obasanjo a dossier containing evidence suggesting that Odili had helped bankroll the opposition to the third term constitutional amendment earlier this year. Opposition to the third term was a scarlet sin in Obasanjo's political theology and no amount of ablutions nor renewed pledging of loyalty could remit this transgression, asserted Damachi. To reward Odili for this chicanery, Obasanjo released the EFCC

to go after Odili, opined Damachi.

¶4. (C) Odili was now in a bind, Damachi asserted. He had spent vast sums campaigning for the presidency and vice presidency, but these positions were quickly fading from reach. However, to continue in the quest might serve only to whet the President's ire ever more. Considering Obasanjo's penchant for larroping disloyal politicians, Damachi said he would advise Odili to stand down and pledge allegiance to President Obasanjo's candidate, presumably being Governor Yar'Adua. By returning to the flock, Odili would forego the presidency but save his skin and perhaps position himself himself for a ministerial appointment, a senatorial slot or appointment as a member of the PDP Board of Trustees. Damachi predicted Odili would be inclined to continue to fight for the nomination. If Odili did not become supportive of Obasanjo's decision, any future militant activity in Rivers State or the Niger Delta could be attributed to Odili's bitterness at having lost. If so, Odili could be further scapegoated by his detractors to the point where Odili would actually become an enemy of the President. Given Odili's already considerable roster of critics, that addition would be one he should actively eschew, Damachi calculated.

IBB to Run On Non-PDP Platform

¶5. (C) Damachi confirmed reports that Obasanjo offered former military head of state Babangida (IBB) no support for his presidential bid. During their last meeting, Obasanjo gave IBB three options. The first was to join the queue with other presidential aspirants and be screened by the party, the second was to forget his presidential ambitions but be a major factor in selecting the actual candidate, and the third was to take an alternative platform. IBB opted for the last alternative.

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¶6. (C) Damachi explained that IBB felt compelled to run because of pressure being placed on him by his followers and because IBB also thinks he has a mission to govern Nigeria a second time, in order to right his historic record. Damachi said he counseled IBB that running in this election is not in IBB's best interest and that if he wants to remain in the political mix it should be as a kingmaker; he would do better to huddle close to Obasanjo and support Yar'Adua. Doing so would allow IBB to gain favor which would translate into significant influence down the road, Damachi advised.

Military Grumblings

¶7. (S) The military is grumbling, according to a senior naval officer close to Damachi. Too much confusion surrounding the elections has made the country tense and has gotten the military's attention, according to this officer. The military is internally fractious, there is a growing sense within the senior ranks that Nigeria is steering into particularly troubled times. The officer warned Damachi that Obasanjo's hold on the military was tenuous and waning. Additionally southern officers in the military viewed Yar'Adua as another diffident Northerner like President Shagari who could not hold the country together in 1983. The officer also warned that if the south-south does not win the vice presidency, a strata of south-south military officials were likely to react vehemently. This could possibly result in these officers lending surreptitious aid to the Niger Delta militants, this officer forecast to Damachi.

Comment

¶8. (C) Yar'Adua looks more and more like Obasanjo's choice. If true, Yar'Adua will likely win. The question then becomes how will the losers react. A lot of money has been spent. A

lot of promises have been made. Many a vain politician will have to eat humble pie or pursue ambitions under the banner of another party. Looming over this is President Obasanjo's power to use the EFCC to hound and harass those who displease him. Odili, who thought he had Obasanjo's support, learned to his chagrin, that this is a game where loyalties are fleeting and animosities have a much longer shelf life. He joins a growing list of politicians who have misread and overplayed their hand with Obasanjo. The future will tell if Yar'Adua can manage his new relationship with the irascible president a bit better. End Comment.

BROWNE